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ABSTRACT

This report provides a model for the provision of social services to single parents. The activities the center provides include drop-in support groups, workshops on single parent issues, a single parent magazine, individual counseling and community outreach. The report briefly specifies the goals of the center and the rationale behind its activites. The center does not have the funding to carry out all the services it feels are needed by single parents. Requests from several community organizations for help in setting up their own single parent support groups have led to a different emphasis. A future goal may be for the center to concentrate its efforts on providing technical assistance, liaison and facilitator training for other groups, rather than attempting to provide all such services itself. (Author/DOW)

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REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SINGLE PARENT RESOURCE CENTER 1975-1976

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The Single Parent Resource Center was funded in July, 1975, by the Office of Child Development to "provide a viable model for provision of social services to single parents." These services were to include community outreach, information and referrals, counseling, and small, informal support groups aimed at strengthening the survival skills and interpersonal relationships of each single parent family. The Center receives administrative and support services from its parent organization, the Childcare Switchboard/Children's Council, which provides a broad range of services to parents and to the childcare community.

During the period of funding, July 1, 1975 to June 30, 1976, the Resource Center was staffed by one full-time paid person, two support group consultants, and volunteers. The volunteers included members of the Center's ongoing drop-in support groups, and field placements from San Francisco State University. In a year's time we were able to expand and strengthen the drop-in group, develop small contract groups, conduct a series of workshops, publish the first issue of a single parent magazine, and do a considerable amount of individual counseling and community outreach.

After the grant period ended, we were unable to secure continued funding, but were able to maintain the weekly drop-in group and continue our program of community outreach on a volunteer basis.

Recently, C.E.T.A. funds were obtained to provide three paid staff persons for the Center. Our proposal was that this staff would start new support groups around unmet needs, and development comprehensive single parent information and referral resources, as well as support the existing Resource Center program.

Goals and Accomplishments

The 1975 grant proposal to the Office of Child Development listed five proposed goals for the single parent program. The following is an account of these goals and a description of how they were met.

1. Information and Referral

Our goal was for the Childcare Switchboard to give out basic information in the areas of childcare, housing referrals and welfare counseling, and to refer callers to the single parent unit when appropriate for peer counseling and information on our program.

From mid 1975 to mid 1976, the Switchboard answered approximately 350 calls per month from single parents and referred approximately 60 per month to the Resource Center. 298 single parents received counseling or information from the Resource Center.

2. Support Groups

The Center's goal was to continue to hold a regular drop-in group with an average participation of 12 single parents per week. Six ongoing groups of 6 persons per group would be established and meet a minimum of 10 sessions each.

The drop-in was held bi-monthly for the first six months of the year, and weekly thereafter. Attendance grew from an average of 15 at the beginning of the year to 30 at the end.

The purpose of the drop-in support group was to provide a safe, comfortable environment where single parents could meet and share support for a single parent lifestyle. A principal aim of the group was to promote the

formation of peer support networks for each single parent as an essential part of this lifestyle. The group was open to any single parent, whatever their circumstances. Most single parents attended from six to eight sessions. Some came only once or twice. Many attended regularly over a period of a year or more. Others came for awhile, dropped out, and came back when time permitted or they felt the need for support.

The group offered a varied program of open discussion, speakers and planned activities. Programs were facilitated by paid staff, field placements and members recruited from the group itself. All those participating in the facilitation of the group met monthly to discuss facilitation skills and to plan programs.

Eight ongoing, or contract, groups were formed, in which a set number of participants agreed to meet for a designated number of sessions. These included five single mothers' groups, a mixed group of single mothers and fathers, a parents of teenagers group, and a parent education group. The average number of participants in these groups was six.

The ongoing groups were designed to provide a concentrated, supportive growth experience within a group of people who remained constant each week.

3. Workshops

The Resource Center's goal was to develop four workshops on single parent topics and to give each at least once, with an average of 25 participants per workshop.

Eight workshops were developed, with an average of 20 participants each. Topics included (1) Making Relationships Work, (2) Creative Single Parenting, (3) Parent Effectiveness Training, (4) Obtaining a Divorce, (5) Taxes and Insurance for Single Parents, (6) Female Sexuality, (7) Child Custody, and

(8) Welfare and Budgeting.

The workshops were designed to be educational experiences in areas of special concern to single parents. Topics were selected from those suggested by members of our groups and our staff. Workshops were held on Saturdays from 11 to 4, and childcare was provided. Staff and people from the community with special expertise served as leaders.

We found that participants in our eight workshops tended not to be the same people who attended support groups. Some single parents responded more readily to the workshop format than to a support group; and the daytime-weekend time period seemed to be more attractive to single parents who preferred to stay at home on week nights, but sought activities on weekends.

4. Peer Counseling

The goal of the Resource Center was to provide peer counseling on an individual and team basis in both crisis and ongoing situations whenever possible.

Peer counseling was the basic resource of our program. An undocumented number of individual counseling situations of a short-term nature occurred. We recorded 45 cases of ongoing counseling relationships between single parents and staff persons.

Peer counseling occurred continuously as a part of Resource Center activities - over the telephone during office hours, in support groups, and during social events. All of the paid and volunteer staff spent many hours counseling individuals on a formal and informal basis, and members of support groups were encouraged and advised on counseling one another. Exercises on "how to listen," and "how to be supportive" were a regular feature of support group programming.

5. Outreach and Technical Assistance

The goal of the Center was to utilize the media in publicizing its program and to offer general support and information to single parents and the community on the subject of single parenting.

We were very active in pursuing our outreach goals. We put public service announcements on local radio stations and appeared in articles in the San Francisco Examiner, California Living and the Bay Guardian. We spoke before some 25 organizations, professional groups and classes, and distributed our program flyer and newsletter at many public functions.

In addition, our activities received coverage in the Ladies Home Journal, U.S. News and World Report, and Family Circle.

Technical assistance was given to single parent groups in Berkeley, San Mateo County, and Marin County. We spoke to various social service agencies on the needs of single parents, including the Department of Social Services and the Family Service Agency.

Daily requests from agencies and individuals regarding setting up single parent programs in other communities, from the media for information on the single parent situation, and from researchers asking for data and subjects were dealt with.

A Single Parent Magazine. The Resource Center was also to provide a portion of its staff time and funding to support a single parent magazine which was being produced by single parent staff members of the agency as an outreach effort. Two issues were to be produced of 1000 copies each - one in December 1975 and one in June 1976.

The first issue of One Parent Family was published in June 1976. 2000 copies were printed and 1800 copies have been sold to date.

We have always realized that the number of single parents we could serve directly through our program was limited. Many single parents either live out of reach of single parent groups or do not respond to a direct service model. The magazine was designed to reach out to single parents isolated in these ways with a message of support and single parent conciousness.

The magazine was edited and produced by a collective group of single parents from the Switchboard staff and the Resource Center. An extraordinary effort was required to get out the first issue, which appeared six months behind schedule. We were unable to do a second, as projected, without paid staff to coordinate.

Attempting to produce a magazine of this scope, while at the same time coordinating a program of diverse activites and personnel, was probably too ambitious an undertaking. However, even though it took many hours of our free time, all of us who contributed felt the endeavor was extremely worthwhile. A copy of <u>One Parent Family</u> is included with this report.

<u>Summary of Goals and Accomplishments</u>

The Single Parent Resource Center was able to meet almost all of the goals it set up at the beginning of the funded year. We surpassed our goals in developing groups and workshops. We organized more groups with more participants than we had planned. More effort went into individual counseling and community outreach than anticipated.

However, we were never able to develop the comprehensive information and referral files that we found were needed by the single parent community; and although much information and referral was done from the

personal knowledge of staff members, no system was set up to insure the continuance of this portion of our services.

We were pleased with the growth and development of our weekly drop-in, which doubled its attendance and steadily increased the number of minority and male participants throughout the year. Two of our single mothers' contract groups are still meeting on a regular basis, and reports from members indicate that the groups functioned very effectively as support systems for their members.

Our ability to attract and utilize excellent field placements was extremely valuable to the program. All of our field placements were themselves single parents, and were able to serve as effective rap group leaders, counselors and telephone workers. The program also could not have functioned as it did without the contribution of the single parents who participated in our support groups. Many of them volunteered their energies as group facilitators, fund-raisers, steering committee members and evaluators, as well as in other roles.

The greatest difficulties came in the areas of utilizing staff time and in setting priorities. As a consequence, volunteer facilitators did not receive consistent feedback and training. An inordinate amount of time was spent by the Coordinator and Consultants in working with volunteers and in responding to requests for technical assistance and outreach to the community. We did not succeed in gathering statistics or in evaluating our program in any systematic or comprehensive way. We were also unable to produce the second issue of the magazine.

The overall scope of this program was too broad for a staff of only one full-time paid person, but it is difficult to set priorities and limit

services when the need is great. And while the program aroused expectations within the Center itself and in the community that could not be fulfilled, what we were able to accomplish served as an indicator of what could be done and what is needed.

The Present Program and Future Plans

The Single Parent Resource Center has received a grant from the City's C.E.T.A. program for one full and two half-time staff positions. The project was funded to start new support groups (1) in areas of the city not presently served by support groups, and (2) for categories of single parents who have special need of support - pregnant single women and new single mothers, for example.

A second goal is to compile a information and referral file based on the needs of the single parent community and develop a system for making referrals in conjunction with the Childcare Switchboard.

The final goal is to provide liason and support services to the Center's existing drop-in support group.

We are currently open four hours a day (9 to 1, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, and 1 to 5 Tuesday) for information and referral and peer counseling. One staff member is engaged in developing referral resources and constructing a file system. Another is doing outreach in the Haight-Ashbury and Western Addition communities where we hope to help start a new support group soon at the Audrey L. Smith Developmental Center. A group for pregnant single women and new single mothers will hold its first meeting November 4, with staff facilitating.

Monthly steering committee meetings will be held with members of the Monday night drop-in so that smooth liason with that group can be established. The Children's Council has undertaken the supervision of a professionally-staffed Monday night childcare program for the growing number of children cared for during group meetings, and the group has committed itself to

fund-raising projects to subsidize their childcare. This will enable them to keep the amount of the weekly donation requested low and voluntary. This group, and the Resource Center, are firmly committed to offering quality childcare for all meetings, and to not excluding any single parent from participating because of lack of funds.

A number of organizations - a church, several childcare centers, a Jewish Community Center - have contacted us for assistance in setting up single parent support groups. We are beginning to see that our efforts can perhaps best be used in providing technical assistance, liason and facilitator training for these groups, rather than attempting to set them up ourselves. If our goal is to see that single parents in as many parts of the city as possible have access to groups which meet their needs, then it would seem best to work with institutions which already have facilities, staff and potential participants. Any developmental efforts on our part should be aimed at groups or neighborhoods not already represented.

Future plans include starting a regular seminar for facilitators of single parent groups, open to anyone engaged in, or wishing to engage in, such work. Regular classes on parenting skills need to be either set up or made accessible through existing resources.

We want to put more emphasis, both in groups and through information and referral, on survival needs. We are sponsoring a children's clothing exchange October 29. Developing housing resources - apart from our present shared housing file - is a top priority.

All variety of single parents have asked for recreational events they can share with their children. An excursion to get pumpkins from Half Moon Bay for Halloween is planned for this month, and other such events

will be coordinated by staff on a monthly basis. It is hoped that a network of the city's single parent groups can be established which can share in the participation and planning of these events.

Such a network would be a natural way for the Resource Center to promote and accomplish support for single parents city-wide.

We are looking forward to an exciting, productive, and creative year.

STATISTICS AND SURVEY INFORMATION ON THE SINGLE PARENT RESOURCE CENTER POPULATION

For a period of approximately six months in 1975-76 a questionnaire was distributed to each person who participated in our drop-in support group. The following information was gathered from 95 responses.

About 50% of the group had one child and lived alone with that child. Fifty percent were in their thirties, with the next largest group in the 26-30 age bracket.

The majority were White women; however, the number of men as well as persons of Black, Latin or Asian ancestry increased consistently during the time of the survey. Based on projections of the current trend, male-female ratios should approach 50% within a year.

A range of income levels was represented. A third reported making over $650 per month. Another third made under $450. A quarter of the group was on welfare. Only about 20% of the population was receiving child support payments.

We attracted people at different stages of separation and divorce. Fifty percent of the group had been divorced; 25% were in the separation stage. About 5% were widowed. Most divorced persons had separated from their spouses less than three years previously. About 20% of the population had never been married.

Participants came to the program through a variety of referral sources. About a third were referred by the Childcare Switchboard. Many were referred by a friend. Other referral sources included the San Francisco T.A.L.K. Line (a 24-hour "hot" line), the telephone book, and the newspaper.

Sixty percent of participants had custody of their children. Only a small percentage were getting weekend relief from the other parent. A growing number were weekend parents themselves, male and female, who needed to relate to other parents for support and feedback in doing a good job on a part-time basis.

A survey on needs was also taken during the year, with 50 respondents.

The three most frequently expressed needs of single parents surveyed were: (1) meeting other single parents, (2) sharing problems and ideas, and (3) getting support from other single parents.

Another often-mentioned need was parenting information - learning how to be a good parent, developing parental skills, understanding children on a better level, and keeping communication lines open.

Other needs listed by the single parents were:

Participating in social events and finding new resources.

Exploring alternative lifestyles.

Dealing with the ex-spouse.

Maintaining perspective as a single parent.

Meeting members of the opposite sex.

Opportunity to express oneself.

Finding social situations for children.

Skills in surviving as a single parent.

Workshops on specific issues - legal problems, sexuality, welfare counseling, parental skills.

Referrals to therapy, childcare, shared living situations, legal assistance.

Evaluation of the above needs should take into account the statistical information given above on ethnicity, income, and other factors. A similar survey of a group of single parents with different backgrounds could well yield significantly different results.

Respondents also seemed to tailor their answers to those needs which they could envision being addressed by a program such as that of the Single Parent Resource Center.